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MEMORANDUM

To: Transportation Committee

Date: July 23, 2010

From: Don Kopec, Deputy Director, Planning and Programming

Re: Unconstrained Major Transportation Capital Project Descriptions

The *GO TO 2040* plan includes recommendations for major capital projects in both fiscally constrained and unconstrained categories. Initial drafts of the plan focused on the fiscally constrained projects, with limited attention to the fiscally unconstrained ones. In response to comments from this committee, a brief list of fiscally unconstrained projects was also included in the draft of *GO TO 2040* released for public comment in June. Staff recommends, based on comments from the public and from implementers, that additional description be included in the plan concerning the unconstrained projects, including descriptions of the projects, their status, and eligible activities.

The remainder of this memo contains new text that is recommended to be inserted into *GO TO* 2040 in place of the "Other projects" subheading in the section on major capital projects, replacing text from pages 195 to 198.

Comments from committee members or adjustments to project descriptions are requested by August 13.

Unconstrained Projects

A number of projects were evaluated but are not included in the fiscally-constrained priority list for *GO TO 2040*.¹ The placement of a project on the fiscally unconstrained list does not mean that it is undesirable or not recommended. Some projects on this list showed regional benefits, but are not far enough along in the study phase to have firm cost estimates, alignment, or limits. Other projects may have potential for innovative financing arrangements that would significantly change their public sector cost or implementation schedule. For both of these cases, more detailed information or changes in financing status would justify reconsidering whether the project should be placed on the fiscally constrained list. More detail on each unconstrained project is provided below.

Central Area Transitway

This project includes a number of elements meant to improve circulation in downtown Chicago, including exclusive busways or priority lanes on city streets. Several elements of this project, including any bus improvements on surface streets, can proceed at any time; the only elements of this project which are unconstrained are the construction of major capital facilities including exclusive and separated busways.

CTA Blue Line West Extension

This project would extend the CTA Blue Line to the west along the I-290 and I-88 corridors, with either Maywood, Oak Brook, or Lombard being used as a western endpoint. It should be evaluated further as part of the continuation of the Cook-DuPage corridor study. The initial evaluation of the project showed it to be beneficial, but a more detailed feasibility study is needed.

CTA Brown Line Extension

This project would extend the CTA Brown Line along Lawrence Avenue to connect with the CTA Blue Line at the Jefferson Park station. The project shows benefits in a heavily-travelled corridor, and improves transit connectivity, but it is quite costly. The project is in early stages of development, and further investigation of the feasibility of this project, as well as alternative busbased service such as ART or BRT, is needed.

CTA Circle Line (Phase II; south)

This project would travel south from the Ashland station of the CTA Green and Pink Lines, connecting to the CTA Blue Line and continuing to the CTA Orange Line. After this, the route will use the CTA Orange Line alignment to travel into the Loop. This segment of the Circle Line is progressing through the Alternatives Analysis phase of the federal New Starts process; the next step in the process will be the selection of a Locally Preferred Alternative.

CTA Circle Line (Phase III; north)

¹ For more detailed information and analysis, see the *GO TO 2040* capital project page at http://www.goto2040.org/scenarios/capital/main/.

This project would connect the Ashland station of the CTA Green and Pink Lines (also the northern terminus of the southern portion of the Circle Line) to the CTA Red, Brown, and Purple Lines in the vicinity of North Avenue within Chicago. Planning for this segment of the Circle Line is in an early stage and its benefits and costs cannot yet be assessed.

CTA Orange Line Extension

This project would extend the CTA Orange Line to the Ford City shopping center, in southwest Cook County, from its current terminus at Midway airport. It has completed the Alternatives Analysis process required to access federal New Starts funding, and a Locally Preferred Alternative has been identified. Per FTA regulations, the project may not initiate Phase I engineering unless it is on the fiscally constrained list, but other scoping and planning activities are permitted and may continue. In particular, performing supportive land use and economic development planning around the proposed terminus would improve the project's effectiveness and should be pursued.

CTA Yellow Line Enhancements and Extension

This project would extend the Yellow Line from its current terminus in Skokie to Old Orchard Mall in northern Cook County. It has completed the Alternatives Analysis process required to access federal New Starts funding, and a Locally Preferred Alternative has been identified. Per FTA regulations, the project may not initiate Phase I engineering unless it is on the fiscally constrained list, but other planning scoping activities are permitted and may continue.

DuPage "J" Line

This project involves the construction of a new bus-only lane on I-88 through DuPage County from Naperville Road to IL 83. It also includes service on nearby arterial streets and improvements to these streets, though these are not considered part of the major capital project. The DuPage "J" Line may initiate operations as an express bus or ART-type service at any time, and this is supported by *GO TO 2040*; the only portion of this project which is fiscally unconstrained is the construction of a new lane on I-88. As indicated in the Cook-DuPage corridor study, there is a significant need for north-south transit alternatives in western Cook and eastern DuPage Counties, and this project may be able to address this need.

Elgin O'Hare Expressway Far West Extension

This project would build on the Elgin O'Hare Expressway West Extension (described below) by upgrading US 20 through northwest Cook County. It is contingent on the completion of other projects and is in an early stage of planning.

Elgin O'Hare Expressway West Extension

This project would extend the Elgin O'Hare Expressway west from its current terminus in Hanover Park to a location along US 20 near Bartlett Road in Streamwood. A transit element may be included as part of this project, which is in an early stage of planning.

Express Airport Train Service

This project would provide express service along the CTA Blue and Orange lines, speeding connections to downtown Chicago. It also would include upgraded vehicles and a new downtown terminal that would allow airline and baggage check-in. Private financing may be necessary for this project to become financially feasible.

I-55 Add Lanes and Reconstruction

This project would reconstruct I-55, add a lane in each direction, and improve interchanges through western Will County, from the I-80 interchange south. This project follows similar projects that have been completed on segments of I-55 farther north. Project planning should include consideration of a managed lane, due to high freight volumes in this area. Planning for portions of the project is currently underway. Per FHWA regulations, the project must be included as a fiscally constrained project before Phase II engineering of the add-lanes portion of the project may begin. Other project elements that do not involve adding a lane on I-55, including interchange improvements or additions, may occur at any time.

I-57 Add Lanes

This project would add one lane in each direction to I-57 in eastern Will County, from I-80 south to the proposed South Suburban Airport. Project planning for this project is in its early stages.

I-80 Add/Managed Lanes

This project would add a lane to I-80 through southwestern Cook and Will Counties, from I-294 to the Grundy County line. This may be considered as a managed lane over some or all of its length. This project is in an early stage of planning. (Improvements to a shorter segment of I-80, from US 30 to US 45 in Will County, are in the fiscally constrained portion of *GO TO 2040*.)

I-80 to I-55 Connector

This project would connect the Illiana Expressway (which has a western terminus at I-55) and Prairie Parkway (which has a southern terminus at I-80). It is contingent on the completion of these other projects.

IL 394

This project would add lanes to IL 394 from I-80 south in southern Cook and Will Counties, and convert the roadway from an arterial to an expressway. Local officials in the area have expressed concern about the effect of the conversion of the roadway to an expressway on nearby economic development. This project should be examined to determine if operational alternatives to expressway conversion are available. Per FHWA regulations, conversion of the facility to an expressway may not advance to Phase II engineering unless the project is fiscally constrained. However, any operational or arterial-based improvements may occur at any time.

Illiana Expressway

This project would create a new expressway from I-65 in Indiana to I-55, passing east-west through Will County. Funding for Phase I engineering for the Illiana Expressway -- the next step in development of the project -- is included within the fiscally constrained project list. The inclusion of engineering costs for the Illiana on the fiscally constrained project list demonstrates

the region's support for its continued development. The project's construction costs are on the fiscally unconstrained list. The rationale for including construction costs on the unconstrained list is twofold:

- First, while the project's assumptions include tolling of some sort, initial revenue projections show that tolls significantly higher than those charged on the rest of the Tollway system would be necessary to cover construction and maintenance costs. Additional analysis of financing options needs to take place. CMAP also supports state legislation that would allow the use of PPPs for this and other projects. On June 9, 2010, the Governor of Illinois signed legislation authorizing the Illinois Department of Transportation to "enter into one or more public private agreements with one or more contractors to develop, finance, construct, manage, or operate the Illiana Expressway on behalf of the State." This is a necessary first step; identification of potential private funding sources is now needed.
- Second, the segment of the project between I-55 and I-57 has not been studied and a wide variety of alignments and interchange points with I-55 are possible. The cost of the project, as well as its benefits, is dependent on the option chosen. CMAP supports initiating Phase I engineering for the project in order to narrow the project scope to a few feasible alternatives, and recommends that these activities begin as a high priority.

Inner Circumferential Rail Service

This project would create a new north-south transit connection through western Cook County, also connecting to both O'Hare and Midway airports. Both this project and the Mid-City Transitway appear to have potential to serve the need for north-south transit travel in central and western Cook County. A feasibility study for this project has been completed, but further planning is needed to advance it. This project should be evaluated further as part of the continuation of the Cook-DuPage corridor study.

McHenry-Lake Corridor

This project would create a new expressway through McHenry and western Lake Counties, from the terminus of the US 12 freeway at the Wisconsin border to the upgraded IL 120 roadway (see the Central Lake County corridor project for a further description). This project is in early stages of planning and relies on the completion of the Central Lake County corridor.

Metra BNSF Extension

This project would extend Metra BNSF service from its current terminus in Aurora to Oswego, in Kendall County. The project is nearly ready to begin Phase I engineering. It has been exempted from the New Starts evaluation process by federal action. However, Kendall County is currently outside of the RTA service area, and should pursue joining the RTA to expedite this project.

Metra Heritage Corridor

This project would improve operations on the Metra Heritage Corridor, which currently serves southwest Cook and Will Counties. The project includes reducing freight conflicts (including addressing some elements of CREATE), upgrading infrastructure, increasing service levels, and adding stations. Many elements of this project (including those associated with CREATE) are not

considered stand-alone major capital improvements and therefore can be pursued at any time. It is currently in early stages of planning.

Metra Electric Extension

This project would extend Metra Electric service to the proposed South Suburban Airport in Will County from its current terminus in University Park, as well as create a new rail yard facility. Supportive land use planning should accompany this and other transit extension projects.

Metra Milwaukee District N Extension

This project would extend the Metra Milwaukee District North line to Wadsworth in Lake County from the Rondout junction. A feasibility study for this project has been completed, but further planning is needed to advance it. Supportive land use planning should accompany this and other transit extension projects.

Metra Milwaukee District N Improvement

This project would improve service along the Metra Milwaukee District North line between Fox Lake and the Rondout junction in Lake County by making track, signal, and other improvements. Many elements of this project are not considered stand-alone major capital improvements and therefore can be pursued at any time. This project is currently in early stages of planning.

Metra Milwaukee District W Extension

This project would extend the Metra Milwaukee District West line from its current terminus in Elgin to Marengo in McHenry County, with an intermediate station in Huntley. An extension along a different route to Hampshire is also under consideration. A feasibility study of the Marengo extension is underway. Supportive land use planning should accompany this and other transit extension projects.

Metra North Central Service Improvements

This project would upgrade Metra North Central Service to allow for full service levels. This project is currently in early stages of planning.

Metra Rock Island Extension

This project would extend the Metra Rock Island District line from its current terminus in Joliet to Minooka in Will and Grundy Counties. This project is currently in early stages of planning. Supportive land use planning should accompany this and other transit extension projects. (Improvements to the Rock Island District line which do not include an extension are included among the fiscally constrained projects.)

Metra Southeast Service Corridor

This project would create a new rail line that provides service to communities in southern Cook and northern Will Counties. It has been undergoing Alternatives Analysis by Metra, and the selection of a Locally Preferred Alternative may be occurring in the near future. The project should remain a fiscally unconstrained project until such time as a Locally Preferred Alternative

is accepted by the FTA and the project demonstrates financial feasibility. The Alternatives Analysis work should include detailed cost estimates; a demonstration of the financial capacity to cover the capital and operating costs; and a financial commitment detailing the availability of state and local funds to match federal New Starts funds. Innovative financing options should also be explored.

Metra SouthWest Service Extension and Full Service

This project would extend Metra SouthWest Service to Midewin in Will County from its current terminus in Manhattan. This project is currently in early stages of planning. Supportive land use planning should accompany this and other transit extension projects. (Improvements to SouthWest Service which do not include an extension are included among the fiscally constrained projects.)

Metra STAR Line Corridor

This project would create a new rail service from Joliet to Hoffman Estates through western Will, DuPage, and Cook Counties, and also connect from Hoffman Estates to O'Hare airport along I-90. The project has been undergoing Alternatives Analysis by Metra, and the selection of a Locally Preferred Alternative may be accepted by the FTA in the near future. Though the project does demonstrate benefits and has strong local support, significant funding issues concerning the STAR Line need to be resolved. As with other strong projects on the unconstrained list, innovative financing options should be considered in the STAR Line corridor. Also, other options -- such as including a transit component with the I-90 Managed Lanes project, or the O'Hare Schaumburg Transit Service project (which travels along the Elgin O'Hare Expressway rather than I-90) -- should be considered to improve transit service in the larger corridor. In particular, opportunities to initiate bus-based transit service as part of the I-90 Managed Lane project should be strongly considered, even if these serve primarily to test the market and build ridership for a larger capital investment later.

Mid-City Transitway

This project would create a new north-south transit corridor in the vicinity of Cicero Avenue in central Cook County, and also connecting east to the CTA Red Line. Both this project and the Inner Circumferential Rail Service appear to have potential to serve the need for north-south transit travel in central and western Cook County. The mode of this project is not yet certain, ranging from an on-street Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service to a rail service. This project is in the early stages of planning, and should be evaluated further as part of the continuation of the Cook-DuPage corridor study.

O'Hare to Schaumburg Transit Service

This project would include both a transit component of the Elgin O'Hare eastern extension (part of the Western Access project on the fiscally constrained list) and a new transit service on IL 53 from the Elgin-O'Hare Expressway to Schaumburg. Project development should be accelerated to attempt to take advantage of the opportunity to plan for this project as part of the Elgin-O'Hare eastern extension, even if the transit service only includes operations (rather than major capital construction) in its early stage.

Prairie Parkway

This project would create a new expressway between I-88 and I-80 in Kane and Kendall Counties. Phase I engineering for this project has been completed, and federal earmarks to cover a portion of project costs have been received, but funding is insufficient to construct the entire project. However, one element of this project, involving a bridge over the Fox River in Yorkville to connect US 34 and IL 71, has independent utility and can be completed with the earmarks received. This project element may be pursued at any time. For the remainder of the project, corridor preservation activities should be continued in order to preserve a transportation corridor in this area for future use.

South Lakefront Corridor

This project would improve service along Chicago's lakefront from downtown Chicago to the south. It could include a new light-rail service or operational improvements to existing Metra services; variations of this concept have been referred to as the Gray Line or the Gold Line. It is recommended service in this area be studied with participation by CDOT, CTA, and Metra, considering whether operational improvements can be made rather than a major capital project.

ACTION REQUESTED: Discussion.